THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI KAMAL NATH): (a) and (b) Information on the number or size of foreign companies making profits, breaking even or incurring losses is not maintained by the Government. However, a study conducted by the Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) based on a sample survey of foreign companies doing business in India found that 77% of them were making profits and 9% were breaking even.

Measures to improve the Tea Industry

789. SHRI SILVIUS CONDPAN: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) what are the measures adopted by Government to improve the sick Tea Industries in Assam, West Bengal, Tripura, Karnataka and Kerala;

(b) whether Government has made any in-depth studies regarding claims of various tea garden managements on causes of the sickness of their companies; and

(c) if so, what are the findings?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI KAMAL NATH): (a) Several measures have been taken by the Government to assist the tea industry in India. These include setting up of a special fund with collections of additional duty of excise on tea Re. 1 per kg. during the years 2003-04 and 2004-05 for the long term development and modernisation of the tea plantation sector, implementation of a Special Tea Term Loan envisaging restructuring/rephasing of irregular portion of outstanding term/ working capital loans in the tea sector with repayment over 5 to 7 years with a moratorium of 1 year, implementation of a price subsidy scheme for small tea growers, introduction of a Price sharing formula for ensuring fair return to small growers, launching of quality upgradation programme aimed at improving the quality of tea and thereby improving the prices etc. in addition, in the Union Budget for 2005-06, the additional excise duty of Rs. 1/- per kg. on tea has been withdrawn.

(b) and (c) In order to address the problems of the closed tea gardens in the country, in January 2003, the Government of India had appointed three Expert Committees to make an in-depth study of the closed tea gardens in the States of West Bengal, Kerala, Assam & Tripura. These Expert Committees studied 36 gardens which were lying closed in 2002. The main causes for sickness/closure as identified by the Committees include

inherent weakness of the gardens due to poor yields arising out of poor condition of the garden and factory, poor garden management and the management's excessive reliance on debt with negligible equity infusion etc.

Ban on duty free import of pepper for export

790. SHRIMATI VANGA GEETHA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government has banned duty-free imports of pepper for export production under the Advance License Scheme as per media reports; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI KAMAL NATH): (a) and (b) The duty free import of pepper under the Advance Licensing Scheme has been stopped *vide* Public Notices No. 31/2004—2009, dated 14.12.2004 and 33/2004—2009, dated 17.12.2004.

Import of fish and fish products from Thailand

791. SHRI N.K. PREMACHANDRAN: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government accorded permission for the duty free import of 82 (eighty two) varieties of fish and fish products from Thailand; and

(b) whether Government propose to review the above decision?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI KAMAL NATH): (a) India and Thailand have signed a Framework Agreement on 9th October, 2003 for working towards establishing a Free Trade Area (FTA). The key elements of the Framework Agreement cover Goods, Services and Investments, and Areas of Economic Cooperation. The Framework Agreement also provides for an Early Harvest Scheme (EHS) under which common items have been agreed for elimination of tariffs on a fast track basis. The implementation of the Early Harvest Programme commenced from 1.9.2004. It includes 4 items of fish and fish products at 6-digit HS Code, *viz.* Salmon (160411); Sardines, sardinella and brisling or sprats (160413); Mackerel (160415) and Crab (160510).

(b) There is no proposal to review the decision.